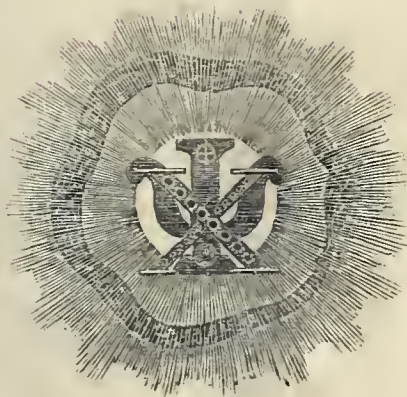


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CONVENTION

OF

THE CHI PSI SOCIETY,

HELD AT

TROY. JUNE 7, 1854.

ORATION,

BY REV. J. A. PRIEST, A. M.,  
OF THE HAMILTON ALPHA

POEM,

BY C. S. ROBINSON, A. M.,  
OF THE WILLIAMS ALPHA.

---

TROY, N. Y.:

FISK & AVERY, BOOK AND JOB PRINTERS, 247 RIVER STREET.  
1854.



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WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY, }  
June 9th, 1854. }

REV. J. ADDISON PRIEST, M. A.

DEAR SIR :

At an adjourned Meeting of the Chi Psi Convention, held after the Literary Exercises of June 7th, it was

*Resolved.* That the delegates to the Chi Psi Convention, tender to Bro. Priest, their sincere thanks for the elaborate address delivered before them this evening, and that a copy of the same be respectfully solicited for publication.

In behalf of the fraternity,

WM. AUG. SMITH.

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COOPERSTOWN, }  
June 23d, 1854. }

DEAR SIR :

A proper estimate of its merits, would doubtless lead me to withhold the address which I had the honor to deliver before the Chi Psi Convention in the City of Troy, on the 7th instant, and which you, in behalf of the convention ask for publication. But I do not feel at liberty to deny your request, and therefore yield to the fraternity that which was dedicated to it from the beginning, hoping that it may serve to diffuse amongst its members the sentiments which I attempt to advocate.

Most truly Yours,

MR. WM. AUG. SMITH,  
Wesleyan University.

J. A. PRIEST.



# THE VALUE OF THEORIES.

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My task is somewhat peculiar. I am called upon to address, primarily, an audience of students ; but not in academic halls. Away from that unique atmosphere which lingers around old seats of study, where only narrow paths are worn across the spreading green, and gowned forms are moving with leisurely pace amidst the ancient trees ; where the dingy edifices lift their homely, though venerable forms in isolated dignity, and the well-worn bell sends down a kind of leafy tinkling through the shady groves ; here, in the stirring city, where the carts rattle along the stony pavements, and the hammering of the artizan, and the voice of the tradesman mingle with a confused hum, I am to discourse of that which will come home to students' hearts. And not this only ; with the odor of college memories stealing all around me, recalled by the presence of those who from various seats of learning have come hither to testify their affection for our cherished fraternity, to that beautiful life which can

never be mine again, and tempted to indulge in pleasing reveries of the things of yore, I am to address those also, who, with no common inheritance of olden memories, have nevertheless honored us with their presence, on this occasion. Surely the task is somewhat peculiar. Were I able, it would hardly seem appropriate that I should lead you up the ascent of Parnassus or give you to drink of the waters of Helicon ; nor yet, were I able, would it seem wholly appropriate, that I should conduct you to the whirling wheels of Lowell, or descant on the laws of commerce, or the mysteries of exchange. But there are points of close contact, between the things which belong to the man of study and the man of business, which may with propriety be discussed on such an occasion as this, nevertheless. From the opposite poles of the life which is concerned with the *philosophy* of things, and of that which belongs to their *practice*, they run like radii, which terminate in a common centre.

Between men in active life and those employed in study, there are few greater differences of opinion, than that which concerns *theories*. On the part of the former, there is a general disposition to decry them ; to characterise them as vague, dreamy, baseless, aimless, useless ; to look on them as dry skeletons, destitute of vitality and fit only for the charnel-house in the mother earth of the brain from which they sprung. On the part of the latter, there is ever a tendency unduly to exalt and magnify them. While in the seclusion of the study, and in

the processes and aims of philosophy, they are counted as of inexpressible value ; in the great, busy world, there are few things which receive a greater measure of contumely and ridicule. Popular journals scout them, public speakers sneer at them ; they are treated as the peculiar furniture of star gazers, or the rubbish of old, dead centuries ; they are cast out from the great busy work-shop of life, as a mass of useless trumpery.

And I am inclined to think that the spirit of contempt for theories is increasing. You find it in *theology*, in the prevailing tendency to decry creeds and formulas, in the tone of popular preachers, who hold up *doctrines* to contempt, and in expending on them their scorn and ridicule, often rise to their finest flights of imagery and eloquence. You find it in *law*, in ceaseless attempts to simplify codes ; to throw in the back ground general principles, and to give the specific simple *letter* for every possible legal emergency. You find it in *miscellaneous life*, in the absence of everything which indicates reflection ; in that exciting, emulous haste, which is oblivious of all but direct achievement. Certain am I, that it is characteristic of the age in which we live, and above all other people on the face of the earth, of our own.

I have thought it, therefore, not inappropriate or unprofitable to discuss on this occasion THE TRUE VALUE OF THEORIES. *What are they worth ? Where is their appropriate place ? When are they abused ? What is their undue depreciation or neglect ?*

I am confident that when we remember the broad

field which they occupy, the relation, which they have borne to the past of human history, and the results of their adoption or rejection, we will see in the discussion of this topic, much which is worthy of profound and earnest thought.

And I say *First*, that *theories are possessed of power*.

There never was a more mistaken fancy, than that they are dead and inoperative,—mere chimeras, which have their birth and existence and end, in the brain of their originators,—never going forth to vivify and guide society, and throwing a terrible energy into the outer life,—mere dreamy speculations, visionary conceptions, aimless flights.

A theory, in its legitimate force, is a *doctrine or scheme of things, as existing in the mind*. It is a θεωρία, a mental looking at, a light in which things are internally beheld. It is opposed to practice not, as some have seemed strangely to suppose, in the sense of being inconsistent with, or preventing it; but philologically, in the discrimination of language. Dissevered, directly opposite, as theory and practice are when regarded as words; as things, they may join hands close to the place of their common origin, and go on thenceforward in a glorious and beautiful harmony to work out the loftiest designs. Theories are possessed of power, not, indeed, as existing in the mere forms of speculation, when occupying only the airy chambers of fancy, but when believed, when accepted as true, and made the basis of great and earnest purpose. There are thousands of thousands, who have never made a theory, in its abstract form a

subject of contemplation, who may not possess even a tolerable idea of the true meaning of the word, who have nevertheless *acted* on theories, have received from them, that motive force which made them irresistible in accomplishment. Interwoven, even though unconsciously, in the habits of human thought, they have swayed successive myriads, and changed time and again, the whole face of society.

Theories, in their abstract form, are generally the work of master minds. They are usually the result of close and severe thought, or of slow and wearisome processes of induction. They are necessarily, thus, in their inception, confined chiefly to a few. But just in that degree that the minds of their originators are superior, are they extended downward to the common mass of men. There is a two-fold law by which this takes place : the master mind is *apt* to discover truth, to get at first principles, to analyse and abstract, till the very foundations are laid bare ; and the same mind is strong in swaying an influence over others to lead them to the adoption of its own opinions. Truth is mighty in itself ; a *veritable* theory one which has in it, the prime element of all power, will work its own way. Whenever it has been enunciated, it will in the end, overcome all opposition and be accepted by the general understanding. And it is in the power of a great intellect almost to invest falsehood with the potency of truth ; how much more to win for truth its own native efficiency. A learned writer, who applies his remarks to the specific topic of mental

philosophy says "If we look, for a moment at the law by which thought is propagated, we find that it always descends from the highest order of thinkers to those who are one degree below them ; from these, again, it descends another degree ; losing at each step of the descent something more of the scientific form, until it reaches the mass *in the shape of some admitted fact*, of which they feel that there is not a shadow of doubt ; a fact which rests on the authority of what all the world above them says, and which they therefore receive, totally regardless of the method of its elimination." We are not to suppose, therefore, that because the world acts on things only when they are presented in the concrete, because it does not generally trouble itself with first principles, it has nothing to do with theories. A great theory is like the spirit of man which is in him. It is utterly invisible ; it cannot be discerned by any one of the senses ; and yet it is there ; the necessary condition of life ; guiding, moulding, controlling the outer being. A great theory which has put on flesh, which has clothed itself in some outer form, and is directed towards some specific accomplishment, is often not recognized ; but nevertheless, it is deep in the heart of society ; and if it is like the unseen leaven in the secrecy of its working, it is like that leaven also in its pervading power. When a theory is accepted, when it has worked its way down into the convictions of the people, it is absolutely irresistible. Many a theory of government, or of social order, or of religion has come

forth at its birth from the throes of a great intellect, or it has been the product of a silent though steady process of thought, perpetuated through the passage of centuries; and during the period of its inception, it has been comparatively powerless, but when it has been put into the concrete, and accepted, no force which the world has ever seen has been able to cope with the force of this. Brute force is nothing to the force of accepted theories. Armies have bent to it on the battle field; it has raised up countless recruits from the raw multitude, and made them able to confront and conquer veteran legions tramping onward with the imperturbable march of automata, and with a purpose of iron. It is a simple theory of government, that the people are the source of civil authority, which taking possession of men in the middle of the seventeenth century, has overturned thrones and changed dynasties, has decapitated two kings, raised up the nation, save for one black cloud far up already above its horizon, first in the promise of the future of all the nations of the earth,—has broken forever the strong spell of ancient tyranny, and is sending its potency from the shores of the Mediterranean to the very heart of Europe, from the Golden Gate of California, across the broad Pacific, to the centre of the Flowery Land, and from beyond the silvery sparkling of the majestic St. Lawrence, to the orange groves of the Queen of the Antilles. It was a more specific form of this theory, summed up in the compact maxim, “No taxation without representation,” which fired the

first rebel gun at Lexington, and thundered yet more mightily at Breed's Hill and Saratoga, which called into being a Washington and created the men of our own revolution. It was a theory, that "God alone is Lord of the conscience," which sent the May Flower across the ocean in search of religious freedom in the howling wilderness; and there begot that spirit, of which Lexington and Breed's Hill and Saratoga, Washington and his compeers, were the ripe fruits in the last and noblest merely earthly developmemt of its indestructible vitality. A remarkable illustration of the power of mere theories, especially with regard to what the mass of men care least of all about when presented in the pure form, simple metaphysics, is seen in the history of the philosophy of Aristotle. The entire popular mind, especially in the Middle Ages once was controlled by it; and it is influenced by it, more than is generally apprehended, to this day. His categories became the common law of the human intellect. In theology, in science, in every imaginable department of human inquiry, it worked its way until it ruled the world with a rod of iron. "The minds of those who did think" says Morell "were completely moulded by it: these again governed the reflections of those immediately below them; and from them the results of Aristotelianism, mingling up as they did especially with the religious opinions of the day, reached the whole of the popular intellect." A brilliant astronomer of our own country, in speaking of the protracted conflict between the Ptolemaic and Co-

pernican systems of the universe, declares that, "The followers of Aristotle appear to have regarded their master as absolutely infallible, and gave to his doctrines a credence so firm that even the clearest experiments, the most undeniable evidence of the senses, were sooner to be doubted than the divine Greek," and the power of the Stagirite is not yet broken. As long as the world stands, it will continue to be felt. The French Revolution, with its horrid atrocities and its hideous atheism, was the legitimate product of the sensualistic philosophy of the last century; and grave historians have not hesitated to attribute to the theological dogmas of the Genevan reformer all that is now precious in the liberties of the world. Theories have power. They make the men that make the people. They go down into the heart of the people themselves; and there, unrecognized and unknown, they send forth their mandates and energize mankind.

But again, *theories are in peculiar danger of abuse.*

And I make no prominent reference to their abuse in *mere* theorising; in that aimless round of visionary speculations and impracticable fancies, in which so many waste the term of their earthly existence; but to theories as possessed of the element of power. They are thus liable to abuse, as I suppose, in part from their character. They are comprehensive. They are necessarily general conceptions; inclusive of many particulars. For example, when I say there should be no taxation without representation, I mean

any where; under any form of government; at any time. The statement has the widest possible latitude of application. Now when general theories are adopted, especially concerning topics, which are somewhat abstruse, there are always many particulars which seem to come under them, which in reality do not; or if they actually do, they come with such peculiar shading as to make the rigid application of the general law of doubtful propriety. When then in pushing out a theory to its last extremity, a man applies it improperly, he runs into great peril. He is in danger of losing sight of common sense, truth, and everything besides, and of plunging himself into a labyrinthic maze, from which if he ever emerges, he must go back by a difficult and unwelcome process to the place of his  $\pi\rho\omega\tau\omicron\rho\ \psi\epsilon\acute{\iota}\nu\delta\omicron\varsigma$ , his first error; and there honestly acknowledge and rectify his mistake. But, I apprehend that the great cause of the peculiar liability of theories to abuse is human obstinacy. While there are some Newtons, there is perhaps no where such pride of opinion as among men of a strong intellect. They have much on which to build that pride originally; and the deference, which the world pays them, does not at all tend to diminish it. Let a man once commit himself to a theory, and whatever of pride he has, will be summoned to its support; and unless he has great moral excellence and true nobility of soul, he will rather run himself and others into the greatest absurdities than retract. It is the carrying out of adopted theories proved or disproved, simply because *they have been adopted*, which has at times wrought

such havoc in science, in theology and in practical religion. The adoption of a false theory, or the *perversion* of a true one, is one of the most potent things on earth for evil. I know of no more striking examples of the abuse of theories than those furnished in the history of sensationalism and idealism in philosophy. Beginning in their modern form respectively with Locke and Descartes, they were to some extent noble things; and a system of conservative eclecticism might have used them both for the advancement of human knowledge. But they each had disciples, and as is the case with disciples generally, they "out-heroded Herod." As their principles were finally perverted, neither was Locke, a Lockian, nor Descartes, a Cartesian. They were both reverent believers in the divine origin and authority of Christianity, and would have shrunk appalled from the contemplation of the use which was really made of their respective theories. But each was finally constituted the godfather of a scheme of pantheistic atheism. Across the broad gulf which separates the two systems, their adherents at last shook hands over the terrible annunciation that a personal Deity is "the diseased fiction of an unenlightened and enthusiastic age." Condillac by causing the distinction which Locke had made between the passive and active faculties of the mind, thus *preserving* in the will an indestructable basis for human responsibility, to disappear, abolished every ground of morality and religion; and the French Encyclopedists finished the work of devastation

which he had begun. And the dogma of Descartes, *that the perpetuity of the universe depends on the productive power of Deity as much as did its original creation*, logically and rigidly carried out by Malebranche and Spinoza, terminated in converting this vast universe of mind and matter, into two modes of the divine existence, thought and extension, and made the earth on which we tread and the spirit which is in us alike portions of God: the co-equal fragments of the all pervading Essence! That is, dethroned the Most High; dissipated his intelligence, freedom and personality into thin air and made the hoary conception of a self existing, holy, infinite Eternal, a sickly phantasy, an unsubstantial dream. Well might Tennyson say in his beautiful description of mere intellectual knowledge :

“What is she cut from love and faith,  
But some wild Pallas from the brain

Of Demons! fiery hot to burst  
All barriers in her onward race  
For power. Let her know her place;  
She is the second, not the first.

A higher hand must make her mild,  
If all be not in vain; and guide  
Her footsteps, moving side by side  
With wisdom, like the younger child;

For she is earthly, *of the mind*,  
But wisdom, heavenly, *of the soul*.”

A blind theory, buried in the soul, sealing it up to the ingress of all beside, and squaring the universe according to its measure, is one of the most fearful things which man can admit within him. Poor France and poorer Germany, branded “Infidel” and

“Atheistic,” in their downward descent from depth to lower depths, are at this day, at once the proofs and the beacons of the peril to man, from the reckless pushing out of simple theories. It is perhaps unnecessary for me to speak of the opposition, with which *physical science* has met among men, from the obstinate adherence of the learned and unlearned to long received theories. Instances must occur in great numbers to every mind. But I cannot refrain from the mention of at least one. Astronomy, above all the physical sciences, has probably had to fight the hardest battle for advancement against false theories. On the revival of learning in Europe, the wisdom of the Greeks and Romans was all which the world possessed; and among its choicest treasures was the Ptolemaic theory of the structure of the universe. Making the earth the centre, for the sake of simplicity, it had constructed in the heavens a system of cycles and epicycles to explain observed motions, until all was involved in the most profound and hopeless complexity. From long doubt and final disbelief, Copernicus struck boldly out from our planet into the boundless fields of space in search of another centre. He rested on the sun, and from a series of observations and tests of his great hypothesis, he arrived at the magnificent conclusion that the orb of day is the centre of celestial motion, and that our firm earth with its sister spheres is accomplishing an endless round, about the central luminary. And more than three centuries of such progress in astronomy, as has almost given the key of the universe into the hands of men, has proved

beyond the possibility of a future question that the daring Polander was right; that he had discovered the grand secret which admitted mortals into the arcana of the skies. But how fearful was the storm of opposition with which his system was confronted in its infancy by the old theory! "Even the church, not following, but leading the world in this profound respect for ancient philosophy, pronounced the doctrines of Ptolemy in accordance with the revelations of Scripture, and girdled them with the fires of persecution through which alone their sacredness could be attacked." And poor, noble, old Galileo, in the prisons of the Inquisition, in the midst of a throng of bigoted monks, compelled at the peril of his life to pronounce the hated sentence, "*Corde sincero, et fide non ficta, abjuro, maledico, et detestor supradictos errores, et hereses,*"—"From my heart and with sincerity unfeigned I abjure, anathematize, and detest the above mentioned errors and heresies,"—and yet stamping his foot and murmuring, "*E pur si muove!*" "and yet it moves!"—is one of the grandest illustrations in all history of the struggle of advancing truth with hoary theories of falsehood. And there is little reason to doubt that to-day in theology, in government, in medicine, in law, in science, and in the arts, old accepted formulas, persistingly adhered to are in many cases, obstructing the onward march of human knowledge and blocking the wheels of civil and moral progress.

But once more; *theories may be made to subserve the highest and the noblest ends.*

This may be readily inferred from the fact that a

theory may be possessed of power. Power is a glorious thing when rightly used. It was a theory, as has been seen, which, infused into the thoughts of the people, began the revolutions of the seventeenth century; which has not yet terminated its mission among men; and will not, till the *world is free*. True theories arrayed against error, oppression and iniquity, set clearly before the minds of men, and earnestly and persistingly urged, will sink down into their hearts, and in the end bring forth a glorious harvest. It may occupy years, nay centuries, before they are successful; but they will finally triumph; and all succeeding ages will partake of the blessedness of their consequences. The theses of Luther were theories; the arguments of Hampden, and Sidney, and Milton were theories; Granville Sharp, promulged a theory; and behold their fruits in the boon of Protestantism to mankind, the almost universal spread, or tendency to spread, of civil liberty, and the nearly utter abolishment from the face of the earth of the accursed slave trade.

But it is with reference to the intellectual advantages of theories that under this, my last head, I propose chiefly to speak. There is in the investigation of theories something which is peculiarly adapted to enlarge and strengthen the faculties of the human mind. Man is created not only to feel and to act, but also to *understand*. There is an aliment in knowledge, which ministers to the higher portion of his being. He may feel and do many things without the possession of a theory. He may have a perception of the sublime and beautiful, he may write

poetry, he may be a sculptor or a painter, he may have power as a writer or an orator. But how natural it is when the sublime or beautiful is felt, to inquire into its essence, to ask, what is that pervading presence, which in the glorious arch of the firmament above or in the falling cataract, or in the tiny flower, impresses us, and seems to call us away from the sensual and the unholy ! And there is no more delightful or profitable exercise of the human intellect than the attempt to discover this impalpable form ; to bring that, which in the sensible object, has filled us with awe or extacy, before the eye of the mind, in its unveiled glory. Burke was no doubt a wiser and better and happier man, that he wrote his *Essay on the Sublime and Beautiful* ; and they are wiser and better and happier also, who following in his path, not content with the feeling or the use of a great and excellent principle, attempt to investigate *its nature*, to find the secret of its power. The *direct aid*, however to *intellectual advancement*, which springs from the possession of true theories, is their highest title to the honor which I have claimed for them. Let a man go to work with no definite doctrine or scheme of the matter which he attempts to handle, with the entire materials on which he is to labor scattered before his mind's eye and he will soon discover that his first work is the formation of a theory. The farmer has a theory as he goes out in spring time to plant his fields and secure the promise of the coming harvest. He has it with regard to the best crops and the best soil from which to raise those crops, with regard to the mode of pre-

paring his soil and of cultivating his grain. If he has not he is a stranger to the demands of his noble calling. He must plough and plant and hoe, and harvest at a venture ; and he must continue so to do until by practice, he has gained possession of correct agricultural theories. The carpenter has a theory ; the mason ; the shoemaker. If not, why that long period of apprenticeship which precedes admission into the full privileges of the ordinary departments of industry ? A man is not a carpenter until he has learned the *theories of the carpenter*, call them by what name he may. Precisely so is it in the mental employments. *The possession of correct general systems, is the measure of intellectual advancement.* There are numberless facts or particulars, which in every department of investigation come under the same head ; they bear the same relation to one another, as the parts to a whole. Now if a man never learns to generalize, all he ever knows he must gain by a tedious process of study concerning each particular thing. He is like the child who goes forth in the morning to the fields, and plucking flower after flower of the same kind, comes home to its parent with each one in succession to ask its name ; not comprehending that every tiny, glossy petalled yellow blossom is a golden buttercup, and that every one of the white multitude that overspreads the grass, making it appear as though the snow had fallen in the night-time, is an ox-eye daisy. A writer to whom I have already acknowledged my indebtedness illustrates the point under discussion by reference to the science of astronomy : “Any careless observ-

er," he says, "can perceive the ordinary facts, on which the science is founded. The laborer at his daily toil knows the moon and the sun and the planets rise and set at particular periods. The slightest attention would be sufficient to tell us that the moon goes through a certain course of changes within a month, and the sun within a year. All these facts, however are included in and explained by the more general fact that the earth moves in an orbit around the sun, and the moon around the earth. This fact again, is included in the dynamic law by which all the movements of the heavenly bodies are regulated; and this again in the universal law of gravitation. The difference, therefore, between the knowledge which a careless spectator possesses of any one of the simple facts of astronomy and that possessed by the man of science, lies here,—that the one observes the phenomenon simply as a phenomenon, while the other investigates it, places it in connection with other parts, and gets much nearer to the universal law or principle from which it proceeds. The man who only observes the simple phenomenon possesses the least knowledge; he who ascends to the more general propositions enlarges his knowledge proportionally; and lastly *his* knowledge is greatest who attains the highest point of generalization, and educes *the fact*, which includes all the rest."

If an individual possesses a correct system, he can at once assign every particular which belongs to it, to its appropriate head; he needs no long and wearisome process of repeated investigation of the same

things ; he perceives all, he judges all, he uses all, as it is *classed* by its great distinguishing qualities. But if, on the contrary, a man never rises to the recognition of general principles, if he does not attain to the possession of systems, he can never pass the period of his intellectual childhood. But systems are *theories* ; whether in law, science, the arts, medicine, politics or theology, they are *doctrines or schemes as held in the mind*.

From the discussion of this entire subject, we learn, I think, certain important truths.

We learn that *theories are not to be despised or disregarded*. There is no ground for that contempt so current amongst the multitude with reference to their employment. They have power ; they are veritable, living realities ; they deserve the most profound study ; and, if right, the most earnest advocacy. *Doctrinal Theology* is not contemptible ; *the great principles of law* are not unworthy of the statesman ; foundation truths in any department of human thought or rights or duties or labors, are deserving of respect, investigation and support.

We learn further, that *theories are not to be adopted lightly or held unalterably*. Thus adopting them or thus holding them, has been the rock on which many a noble mind has split. We are to remember that they are the work of those who are fallible. In their formal expression, they are such, even when professedly and with honesty of purpose drawn from the Word of God. They may be mistaken. They demand earnest thought from

him who accepts them ; they require that when accepted they should at once be rejected, if shown to be untrue.

And we learn yet again, that *they should never be pushed to new and extraordinary conclusions without a most careful re-examination of first principles.*

It was by the neglect of this that Malebranche and Spinoza ran into a fatal pantheism. It is by the neglect of this that nearly all the systems of error which now darken the world have originated. Its neglect is the great hiding place of all-potent, yet most miserable sophistry.

But it is more than time that I should close. With heartfelt congratulation to you, my fellow members, on the prosperity of that honored fraternity for the consultation of whose interests you have here in convention assembled, and with earnest aspirations, for your and its highest and enduring welfare, I conclude with the exhortation, so german to my subject, **LOOK WELL TO YOUR THEORIES ;** they make or mar the man. Let them be well weighed, truthful, righteous, consistently carried out ; and they cannot fail to impart to you the greatness of their power, and to raise you to the fruition of their inseparable felicity.





WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY, }  
June 9th, 1854. }

TO C. S. ROBINSON.

DEAR SIR :

At an adjourned Meeting of the Chi Psi Convention, held after the literary exercises of June 7th, it was

*Resolved.* That the delegates to the Chi Psi Convention, tender to Bro. Robinson their sincere thanks for the highly interesting Poem delivered before them this evening. Also,

*Resolved.* That a copy of the same be respectfully solicited for publication.

In behalf of the fraternity,

Respectfully Yours,

WM. A. SMITH.

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BENNINGTON CENTRE, VT., }  
June 15th, 1854. }

BRO. SMITH :

It was only a fear that this Poem might not be worthy of the honored Fraternity, at whose call it was delivered, that led me at first to hesitate in giving it for publication. It is only the consciousness that I cannot fairly refuse it that leads me to place it in your hands now.

It will accomplish its end, if as it goes to the Alphas, it will carry even a tithe of the good wishes, which I would lay on the well-remembered altars.

Very Sincerely,

WM. A. SMITH, Esq.,

Yours in the bonds,

For the Fraternity.

CHAS. S. ROBINSON.



# MARTYRS.

---

Five strokes of Time's bell in our listening ears  
Have rung, as it tolled for the funeral years,  
Since the day when we stood on life's threshold alone;  
Behind us the long-trodden paths, flower-strewn,  
Before us the world's mighty ocean, unknown.

We are bidden to-day call the past from the dead:  
Show our life-pages here that their record be read,  
Elder brothers who sailed to an unexplored land,  
Now returned from our cruise, at your welcome command,  
To tell you of what lies on life's foreign strand.

Could we give you a name, full of honor and sin,  
Which would designate well the wide world we live in;  
A name that should emblem its shame and its glory,  
Alike of its present and past monitory,  
We would call it the "SMITHFIELD" of old martyr-story!

There are martyrs who never are burned at the stake;  
There are hearts which though sore-bruised for years, never break;  
Life is filled full of martyrdom, weary and long,  
Evil martyring good, and right martyred by wrong,  
And the weak everywhere are crushed down by the strong.

There are false martyrs, too, who to flame-wreaths aspire,  
Chain themselves with a ribbon, and set it on fire—  
And writhing, and twisting, they shout at each turn,  
Perhaps slightly scorched by the torments they earn,  
"Behold with what fortitude we martyrs burn!"

There are martyrs to everything able to vex ;  
 Martyrs to learning, and martyrs to sex ;  
 Martyrs to ignorance ; martyrs to shame ;  
 Martyrs neglected, and martyrs to fame ;  
 And martyrs, to whom no one gives any name.

Listen, then, to our song ; be it sad, be it gay,  
 As the numbers run on in their fetterless way ;  
 And let not the world a mere fantasy seem,  
 Nor the picture we pencil, the shade of a dream—  
 REAL LIFE AND ITS MARTYRS must now be our theme.

That grand old name we honor ; in the years of long ago,  
 When Cant and Superstition made the christian blood to flow,  
 When clouds o'erhung the church of God, when manaeled, and torn,  
 The hidings of her Father's face she long was called to mourn,  
 In those high days 'twas honor, though the world declared it shame,  
 Amid the wreaths of fire to earn and bear the martyr's name.  
 That church stood like a lonely rock upon the ocean's shore ;  
 The storm-spirit howled responsive to the billows, wrathful roar,  
 Wave after wave dashed vengeful up in fierce, tumultuous strife,  
 Swept from its tall, gray summit every pleasant thing of life,  
 Wreathed round its firm-set socket with a maniae scream and stroke,  
 And maddened at its own repulse in thousand billows broke ;  
 While from above, thick clouds and dark their midnight folds let fall,  
 Crashed bolts of thunder—yet the Rock stood firmly through them all !  
 Aye ! made the very lightnings, like the mount of fabled story,  
 To gleam with glare unwilling on the summit of her glory !

It is honor for a stalwart soul his banner to unfurl,  
 Out-float his cherished principle where clouds of conflict curl ;  
 To stand by it unflinching, with a proud and flashing eye,  
 To guard its folds unspotted, while War's legions thunder by,  
 To fall, if need be, by its side still clenched in deathly grasp,  
 To gaze with love unfaltering in the last and rattling gasp,  
 To wreath its folds unyielded round the pierced and bleeding breast,  
 A winding-sheet of glory for the martyr's holy rest !

O ye who walk in memory o'er history's trampled plain,  
 Who search upon its battle-fields the bodies of its slain,  
 Pause, reverent and thoughtful, as ye stand beside the form,  
 Of one whose spirit flowed away upon life's current warm ;  
 Unfold the crimsoned standard ;—let it float upon the air ;—  
 Read with uncovered brow the words his hand had written there—  
 O it is noble thus to die, unyielding, stern, and proud,  
 The banner of our principle, our standard and our shroud !

Such have there been in times now past ; and earth bears record yet ;  
 'Tis written on her hill-sides, in her vales with weeping wet.  
 Ye can trace it on the mountain range that girds the Switzer's land,  
 Whose crags, uplifted monuments for martyr-patriots stand ;  
 Scotland wears it on her heather ; for earth's worthies slumber there  
 Beneath the sods of Nithsdale—by the Irvin, and the Ayr ;  
 Ye may read it, too, at Plymouth, not in lines of style or pen,  
 But stained upon her rock-ribbed coast with blood of stalwart men ;—  
 Aye ! ye will one day read it in a far and brighter land,  
 Ye will one day see the names and deeds of all the martyr-band,  
 Whose bones so long forgotten in unhallowed graves have slept,  
 Recorded in a volume which the angels' hands have kept !

In those good days of our fathers, when old Time was on his flow,  
 Like a streamlet from the mountains gurgling music, long ago ;  
 When all along his channel, as his current marked the hours,  
 The gentle hand of fancy loved to scatter pleasant flowers ;  
 Men grew up close together, like old loving forest-trees  
 Shaking blessings on each other when God sent a favoring breeze ;  
 Stern and sturdy in the spring-time spread their leaflets in the sun,  
 Dropped their offerings at each others' feet when autumn's work was  
 done.

But, alas ! how changed is our time ! How the shame-blood seems  
 to stir

To think how little we are like the men our fathers were,  
 Looking heavenward at each footstep all along the path they trod,  
 And listening to duty, as the solemn voice of God !  
 We settle all our duty-points in Senate-house and Forum,  
 For all the duties our age knows are duties *ad valorem* !  
 And every little fancy, every gushing of the heart,  
 Every beauty of old nature, every master-work of art,  
 Every joke, and every poem, every confidence divulged,  
 Has its price for absolution, if allowed to be indulged.  
 The age we live in is cold-blooded, flings an incubus on Wit,  
 And poor Imagination has to wear a snaffle-bit ;  
 Frolic, too, is put in fetters, and old Fun is dressed in black,  
 Mourning jokes now dead and buried, which he had no leave to crack !  
 The world has grown so practical, in its restless, busy bustle,  
 It utterly ignores all nerve, needs only bone and muscle.

There is left no time for respite, least of all is time for play ;  
 "Work ceaseless, work in earnest," is the watch-word of to-day ;  
 With hand forever tireless, with eye grown never dim,  
 With strength that never wearies in the lithe and sinewy limb ;

Or if the frame is feeble that it cannot bear the strain,  
Let Genius forge its massive thought, upon its anvil-brain !

In this our age when man his soul for profit only barter,  
The world seems most prolific of a sort of pseudo-martyrs,  
Who watch for notes of triumph lifted up by martyrs true,  
To catch their intonation, and thus claim our pity too ;  
Assuming every badge of woe, the drapery of grief,  
Making manifest their mourning in a kind of bas-relief,  
All along the range of sorrow there is no degree exempt,  
From the blood-heat of endurance, to the zero of contempt !

Such are those by some misfortune born too early or too late,  
"Most inauspicious period" in their party, church, or state.  
Poor victims of an age of wrong, disorder, and mischance,  
That leaves them clear behindhand, or that throws them in advance ;  
Notorious for the moanings of the martyrdom they win,  
Conservatives spurred awfully, and radicals held in,  
Both driven, and persecuted, all their lives fit food for laughter,  
Mourn they were not created the day previous or day after !  
To which the world an added clause, amending it, lets fall ;—  
'Twould have saved a deal of trouble if they had not been at all !

There are martyrs, too, to Learning ; one, the overloaded septic,  
Who fears to let his mind eat, lest it might become dyspeptic ;  
Reduced in soul and body, lank, fidgetty, and spare,  
He lives on speculation, as chameleons on the air ;  
And if he ever ventures in Truth's broad sunlight at all,  
He puts up for a guard a sort of moral parasol !

Not so his fellow-martyrs ; just the opposite of that ;  
Men prone to mental plethora, intellectually fat.  
Our spires of erudition, and of academic glory,  
Up-piercing to the very clouds of plain and classic story ;  
Giving hours of patient study to the cities of Epirus,  
And discovering worlds of meaning in the wit of little Cyrus.  
For long years they float whale-like in the literary sea,  
Then after death are tried out, to give light posthumously !

Whenever it may happen that a little man would try a  
Close contest with these giants—little David at Goliath—  
If he cannot wield a spear-staff, thick as a weaver's beam,  
Let him choose but five smooth pebbles from his literary stream,  
Let him give them force centrifugal, with skilful twist and swing,  
Whirled in his popularity, used as a sort of sling,

Then hurl them at his forehead;—when he gets the giant flat,  
It is easy with his own sword to behead him after that !

There are martyrs to Neglect, a forsaken, hybrid crew,  
Who forever are protesting that they cannot get their due.

Young Lawyers, nursed by Blackstone, put in leading-strings by  
Chitty,  
Then thrown out foundling into life to claim support and pity,  
Grown to a height bombastic, full of windiness and fudge,  
Know no—"gentlemen"—but the jury, know no—"honor"—but the  
judge,  
The world sees very well, though they deny it, what they are,  
And always will believe them on the wrong side of the Bar.

Young Doctors, versed in quizzes, without any help for pains,  
Knowing best to wear the spectacles, and sport professional canes.  
Having learned *Materia Medica* enough to make a pill,  
They hold themselves in readiness to either cure or kill;  
And yet the world neglects them; not a call invites their aid;  
Ere-long they find more book-accounts than visits to be paid;  
Their temper and their credit lost, they wildly curse their day,  
Go fuming, foaming, blustering, along their martyr-way;  
At last grown grayer, and grown humbler, and perhaps grown wiser  
too,  
They find that losing patients is the worst thing they can do !

Theologians, just in orders—must we lift the censor's rod  
To lash with stripes satiric holy messengers of God !  
Nay, never let the muse's foot strike with unhallowed tread  
The path of him who stands between the living and dead;  
But there are those who ape their mien, and wear their robes of  
white,  
Whose best care is to darken where Religion would make light;  
Up a kind of moral staircase, like the pulpit they are in,  
Original in nothing, but their own original sin,  
Skilled enough in sermon-writing to know where the texts belong,  
Skilled enough in hermeneutics to interpret scripture—wrong;—  
Out on a bushel under which the Gospel shines so dim !  
Let the poor things be manlier, more earnest, and less prim !  
Let them, if they lead the blind, have wider-open eyes,  
Let them be far less dove-harmless, and far more be serpent-wise !

There are martyrs to their Sex; O a sad, lugubrious host !  
Whom nature has made women, when she needed men the most !  
Feet fitted best for leather, in prunella have to go,

Arms made to shine in broad-cloth, are encased in ealico,  
 Hands so proper for the ticket, from the ballot-box shut out,  
 Tongues that ought to rouse a nation, made to stay at home and pout,  
 Beauty hidden in a bonnet that displays but half the face,  
 Voices made to sing the treble, which would sound a glorious base !  
 These are among the noblest of the martyrs of our time,  
 They stand up in their martyrdom with constancy sublime.  
 We dare not lift our voices here in their reproach at all,  
 We "keep silence in the churches", nor even allude to Paul.  
 We stand amazed, and awe-struck, at a sight so superhuman,  
 We tremble in our littleness before strong-minded woman !  
 We wonder that old nature could have been so mere a tyro,  
 And bury in the dust our face, like Mussulmen at Cairo.

A mighty throng of Lollards now our muse's pen engage,  
 Behold the martyr Queen, the bloody Mary of our age;  
 All hail, thou royal Fashion, and all pity for thy train,  
 Deluding and deluded, yet who love thy galling chain !  
 Look on your Queen, ye martyrs, puny puppets that ye are !  
 Crowned at a fancy-milliner's, and throned in a Bazaar,  
 A monarch universal, old, relentless, proud, and stern;  
 Go, prove how much ye love her, by your willingness to burn !  
 Come, gaze ye on each other; look with calmness, if ye can,  
 At one perehance among you in the semblance of a man:  
 A smile of livid paleness hides his torturing accursed,  
 The smile that pent volcanoes wear the hour before they burst !  
 A poor bestrangled victim, far "more sinned against than sinning,"  
 Hung by protuberant ears upon a parapet of linen !  
 And look ye but once more, and now let reverent eyes be cast,  
 A martyr of that gentler sex that heaven created last.  
 Behold her now, her tortured form, her insect figure see,  
 Hooked like a Hindoo in the back, and swung a devotee !  
 Her shoulders deeply hidden in a bodkined, muslin thicket,  
 Her head, like rogues at Tyburn, half impaled upon a picket !

Hark to the loud commanding of a leader warrioress,  
 Along the lines re-echoing;—"Front face ! attention ! *dress!*"  
 Fashion's grand review of soldiery now bursts upon our sight,  
 We behold the two battalions, both the heavy armed and light,  
 Victorious at the close of war, or rather war of clothes,  
 Just marching from the field where they have met their stubborn foes.

Vast, portly, and tremendous ! each a soldier of the *ton*,  
 Heavy-armed, and heavy-bodied, likelier far to stand than run !  
 But how beautiful the light-armed ! bloom enrobed in bloomer charms !  
 Note how well the little jacket is adapted to bare arms !

There is little waste about it, all is manly, tight, and strong;  
It "wants but little here *below*, nor wants that little *long*!"

Another of life's despots is approaching with his train,  
Dragged at his will unwilling, and galled with many a chain;  
Behold the world's Opinion, marching on his lordly way!  
Disputing even with fashion for the more despotic sway.  
Royal Fashion and Opinion! In life's sea the whale and shark;  
Their rivalry unceasing—pope versus patriarch!

Run through the line of History; ye may mark opinion's path  
By bodies strewn of martyrs to its folly or its wrath;  
Now hand in hand with error, and now valliant for the truth;  
Now courting holy age, and now a reverent friend to youth;  
Receiving now with *ennui* what will soon come with *eclat*,  
One hour shouting "*Vive!*" and in another hour "*Abas!*"  
Doing honor to old customs, as with sad and solemn mien,  
They stand the living monuments of ages they have seen;  
Anon with shameless voice, that once revered those locks of snow,  
Bids each—"go up, thou bald head!"—like the prophet long ago.

Heaven has given many a martyr to this thankless world of ours,  
Eagle-spirit that exultant longed to try its early powers;  
It has screamed to rouse the echoes of the dull and sleeping earth,  
Dwelt in the rocks of mountain-truth, where thought has loftiest  
birth;—  
And yet the world betrayed it, feared its pinions rushing by,  
Quailed in its utter littleness at flashes from its eye!  
And sped by treacherous archery its arrow-shaft has been,  
Winged with the very feathers the proud bird exulted in.

There was one whose blood flowed freely our own stars and stripes  
beneath,  
Whose very name for years was only hissed through hatred's teeth;  
Once filled with earnest love for what was noble and divine,  
With pinions pure and white at first born like the dove to shine;  
But driven by stern opinion, like the raven from the light,  
Black-winged his spirit, and plunged down to deep and utter night!

Let thought with sad and solemn step approach another tomb,  
The name is now, almost like him who bore it, lost in gloom;  
A youthful son of Britain's isle, a stranger far from home,  
He sleeps where fall the shadows of the seven hills of Rome;  
A noble child of genius once, in martyrdom laid low,  
The soul's frail jesses broken by a savage critic's blow;

One of those rarest spirits which the prairie-reed resemble,  
That is broken by the rough blast—only light winds make it tremble !

There was yet another Heaven sent in kindness to earth,  
One of the purer, gentler sex, in love that had its birth;  
Whose lot, so strange, was mingled with another, stranger far,  
The lightning madly mating the serenity of a star !  
On that lone isle of ocean where Napoleon's willows wave,  
They point us in the valley to ambition's martyr-grave;  
But there lies a wreath far brighter, and of more enduring green,  
In the parish church at Ruel, on the grave of Josephine !  
His was a soul that murmured when the heavy stroke had come,  
And hushed it like the muffle on his soldier's funeral drum;  
Her's was a soul more lightly strung, a stricken harp resembled,  
Whose chords vibrated music all the sweeter when they trembled !

In that land of love and beauty, where the magic voice of Art  
Gives utterance to Nature, as she whispers to the heart,  
Within an old Cathedral, where her wondrous touch had been,  
And through whose windows streamed the sun most gloriously in,  
There gathered in earth's younger years a cowed and priestly throng,  
Who met to battle mightily, the right against the wrong.  
They stood beside the altar; all opinion's train were there,  
Their victim was before them, worn with sullen, sad despair;  
Their dark, designing hatred frowned upon the martyr lone,  
The gleaming of the headsman's axe significantly shone;  
He knelt before the symbol of the chosen faith to swear  
Himself a perjured heretic, leagued with the powers of air !  
And strangely rose the words of prayer they lifted up the while,  
Re-echoing through the corridor, and dim, mysterious aisle.  
The old man rose from kneeling at the now polluted shrine,  
The sunlight of his youth was gone, and nevermore to shine.  
Ye might have seen no change upon the furrowed brow to come,  
Ye might have marked no semblance of the spirit's martyrdom ;

But could ye with a mighty hand have torn the veil apart,  
And looked upon the scene with eyes that read the inmost heart,  
Ye might have seen the gibbering fiends with heavy hands to roll  
The great stone of its burial before the sepulchred soul !

Go, talk of these proud martyrs, into utter darkness hurled—  
Aye, preach a mad crusade against a hoary, careless world !  
Kneel humbly as a suppliant at her relentless throne,  
Pray that its lying judgment may hush its hollow tone !—

As well may leaves of autumn, that hang trembling on the stem,  
Beseech the winter-wind to hush, because it scatters them !

But pray at least that memory will give a wreath to twine  
Around the early sepulchre, which love will make a shrine ;  
Beseech its scribe to enter on the record of the dead  
The name, that by a reverent eye through ages may be read !—  
Go, ask the storm-beat branches of the gnarled oak as well,  
That they hold in remembrance where each winter leaflet fell !

O when these lesser lights below before the great light pale,  
When in the opening future everything shall rend its veil,  
Burst be the bonds that fetter now the searching spirit's ken,  
Folded the wings of every cloud that now bewilders men :  
When in the gleaming radiance of the "bright and morning Star"  
We shrink to our own littleness, and seem just what we are ;—  
Then will come to view a history, writ by no earthly pen,  
Whose heroes will wear noble crowns, wrought by no hands of men ;  
Names never brought to notice in the paeans that we sing,  
Will make the plains celestial with triumphant music ring !  
Thank God ! there is a judge beyond earth's ignorance and feud ;  
There is a higher court where these decisions are reviewed !

Now lighter be the muse's trip, and lighter be her song ;  
With thoughts no more of mourning let her scan the martyr-throng.

So changing is opinion that we sometimes meet for rarity  
A sort of pseudo-martyrs to unwonted Popularity !  
On the rock of Saint Helena sunk Napoleon's waning star ;  
Twice martyred by the world was he—the last the worst by far.  
The first time, because hated, buried in unhallowed ground,  
But now become so popular they keep him moving round ;  
For France takes "uncle's" body, and in grand procession carries,  
At every time the "nephew" makes a *coup d'état* on Paris !

What is it to be popular ? 'Tis to be the little ball,  
Dancing on the fountain's current, lifted up to be let fall ;  
Made to play surprising antics while the fickle jet may spout,  
Brought into notice with it, and then left to fall without !  
What is it to be popular ? 'Tis to give the world the hint  
That talent lies within you as the fire within a flint ;  
And then to bear with patience every stupid eritie's blow.  
And listen to his wonder that your genius sparkles so !  
'Tis to be an humble rocket, loaded with explosive thought,  
Which you mean to "shoot off easy" in your own sphere, as you ought ;

Surprised in empyrean space, at height beyond computing,  
You suddenly discover you are shot, instead of shooting !

And this is Popularity ! Aye, that bauble bright and fair,  
Which youth makes earnest struggle for, but manhood scorns to wear.  
Where is the world's long favorite-list ? Go, read it in the sky ;  
Search well among the stars for those she tried to deify.  
*Who* was her old Orion ? What was Lyra, or the Bear ?  
Who knows what maiden ever plaited Berenice's Hair ?  
Aye, read there, too, her judgment ; for of all the stars there were  
She placed the very brightest in the nostil of a *Cur* !

Behold that war-clad leader on the field of fallen men,  
Who stands at evening saddened by the carnage of Brienne ;  
Look just beyond the veil that hides the secrets of the heart,  
Watch carefully the strivings in the breast of Bonaparte.  
There comes a distant, ringing sound, vibrating on the air,  
Borne from a convent vesper-bell, and summoning to prayer.  
Pure thoughts of youth, of life unstained, are in the peal he hears ;  
His head is bowed ;—the stars look down upon a warrior's tears !

There are, within the spirit, vesper-bells with muffled tongue,  
And often when life's sun is low their mournful chime is rung.  
'Tis well to pause at eventide upon the conflict plain,  
And mark with slow, and thoughtful eye the trampled and the slain ;  
'Tis well to ask ourselves, if *we* were on the death-sward lying,  
How noble is the cause to which as martyrs we are dying !

Gone is the spirit of song to her slumbers,  
Paused but an instant to flutter her wings ;  
Hushed is the harp she had tuned to her numbers,  
Wearied the hand that has swept o'er its strings.

Lingers the bard but to whisper his greeting ;  
Memory touches the harp-string anew,  
Joys but to murmur the kind word at meeting,  
Offers her hand to the mystical few.

Welcome to all, younger brothers and older !  
Lengthened the bonds as our circles enlarge ;  
Warmed be the heart that by years had grown colder,  
Strengthened the hands that now bear up our charge !

Yet as with welcome our spirits grow firmer,  
 Fate bids our happiest voices be dumb;  
 Haste we at parting our farewell to murmur,  
 Join we in wishes for years yet to come.

Life is before us; its voices are calling—  
 List, and thou hearest them echoing loud!  
 Yet in its valleys the shadows are falling,  
 Trembles the soul in its fearfulness bowed.

Why need'st thou fear? Though the heart sink within thee,  
 Power not thine own comes in answer to prayer!  
 Force cannot crush thee, nor blandishment win thee,  
 Girt, as thou may'st be, with panoply rare.

On to the future, then, thoughtful but fearless;  
 Pause but to fall on a reverent knee;  
 Rise, with a courage calm, constant, and peerless,  
 Thine may the strength of the "God with us" be!

Be thou a star, set forever in heaven!  
 Dim not thy glory; even when thou must fall,  
 Be like that one of the Pleiades seven,  
 That now is remembered, though lost, best of all!

Quail not at duty! only coward souls fear it!  
 Follow the path where her leadings direct;—  
 And may there no shadow e'er fall on thy spirit,  
 Save that of the great Wing, that falls to protect!

